The UK Quality Code

Version for sector feedback

November 2023
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Version for sector feedback, November 2023

This document contains the proposed revisions for the redeveloped UK Quality Code to be published in 2024. QAA is seeking feedback on this version through an online survey and a series of online feedback events. The online survey will run until 19 January 2024 and builds on engagement activities undertaken with the sector throughout Spring and Summer 2023.

If you have any queries about the redevelopment of the Quality Code, please contact: 
membership@qaa.ac.uk
Introduction

The UK Quality Code

The UK Quality Code articulates the principles of UK higher education for securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality. It is a sector-led reference point which can be used in a range of flexible ways. It enables providers to evaluate their policy and practice in relation to that of other providers and it aligns with key international reference points including the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

Built on a shared understanding across the UK, the Quality Code enables providers to understand what is expected of them and what they can expect of each other, irrespective of the specific regulatory framework in which they operate. It informs the public, protects students’ interests and champions UK higher education’s world-leading reputation for quality.

Structure

The Quality Code comprises two main elements - Sector-Agreed Principles and Key Practices - plus accompanying Advice and Guidance.

The overarching Sector-Agreed Principles identify the features that are fundamental to securing academic standards and offering a high-quality student learning experience in the UK.

The Key Practices set out the ways a provider can demonstrate they are adhering to the Sector-Agreed Principles.

These two elements form the UK Quality Code and are accompanied by underpinning Advice and Guidance that offers further detail across specific topics.
Regulatory information

The UK Quality Code remains a key reference point in the quality frameworks for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England, providers need to comply with the Office for Students’ Regulatory Framework and Conditions of Registration. Engaging with the Quality Code is voluntary for providers based in England, except for those providers reviewed against the Quality Code using the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) method.

All providers across the UK can use the Code to satisfy themselves, external stakeholders and international partners that their quality processes support enhancement above the baseline. Because the Code aligns to the European Standards and Guidelines, it offers providers an internationally-recognised framework through which they can demonstrate their delivery of a high-quality student experience, enabling students to succeed in their studies and progress their personal and professional goals.

How the Quality Code is used

The Quality Code can be used to design and shape providers’ own frameworks for quality and standards. It is a tool for effective institutional evaluation and review of policy and practice. It also acts as a guide for external review, capturing sector-wide principles that providers and external reviewers can use to evaluate institutional practices against.

In applying the Sector-Agreed Principles and Key Practices of the Quality Code, providers are asked to reflect on how their approach supports the creation of inclusive and equitable experiences for staff and students, and how principles underpinning equity, diversity and inclusion can be embedded at a strategic level. This will support all students to fulfil their potential and ensure that no individual or group is disadvantaged by teaching practices or curricula. Engaging students as partners will support the wider aims of inclusivity and enable providers to develop equitable approaches to enhancement.

In addition to equity and inclusivity, the Quality Code supports providers to consider the interrelation between economic, social and environmental factors, so that students can understand and critically engage with the world as it is, envision how it might be and are empowered to deliver that vision. This promotes competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way.

Providers can use the Quality Code to systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students’ learning is supported. Enhancing the student experience involves providers taking deliberate steps which may be part of continuous improvement or more significant changes in policy and practice. In both approaches, providers will engage students and staff as partners in the learning community.
Sector-Agreed Principles for the UK Quality Code

Strategic approach

Sector-Agreed Principle 1: Taking a strategic approach to managing and enhancing quality and standards

Providers demonstrate they have a strategic approach to managing and enhancing quality and standards that is embedded across the organisation.

Key Practices

a. The maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of quality is the responsibility of the academic community of staff, students and governors, and is embedded in the culture of the provider.
b. The strategic approach to managing and enhancing quality and standards is published and supported by a comprehensive and transparent governance framework that is communicated clearly and accessible to staff, students and external stakeholders.
c. External expertise is utilised when monitoring and evaluating academic standards, and in assuring and enhancing quality.
d. The strategic approach to managing and enhancing quality and standards is employed wherever and however provision is delivered.
e. The strategic approach to quality and standards is monitored, evaluated and enhanced on a regular basis.
f. The strategic approach promotes equity and inclusivity for students and staff.

Sector-Agreed Principle 2: Engaging students as partners in the quality of their learning experience

Providers take deliberate steps to engage students as active partners, individually and collectively, in the design, development, quality assurance and enhancement of teaching and learning across all levels of study and across the governance framework.

Key Practices

a. Student engagement through partnership working is strategically led whilst being student centred and is integral to the culture of the provider.
b. Student engagement and representation activities are clearly defined, communicated, resourced and supported. Transparent arrangements are in place for the collective student voice to be heard and responded to.
c. Providers demonstrate how they have engaged with students in a variety of ways and the impact of that engagement, ensuring students recognise their voice has been heard and reflects the wider diversity of the student body.
d. Student engagement opportunities and processes involve student representative bodies (where applicable), are inclusive of students’ characteristics and responsive to the diversity of the student body.
e Providers and student representative bodies (where applicable) recognise and celebrate the contribution of students to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the wider student experience.

f Students are enabled and encouraged to engage actively in the academic governance and enhancement of the co-curricular aspects of their student experience.

Sector-Agreed Principle 3: Resourcing the delivery of a high-quality learning experience

Providers plan, secure and maintain appropriate learning, technology, facilities and human resources, to enable the delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative and high-quality learning experience for students.

Key Practices

a Strategic and operational plans, along with resources, align to the student journey and are designed and implemented to support student achievement.

b Providers ensure they have dedicated and accessible human, digital and physical resources to support and enhance the delivery of their programmes and the well-being of students and staff.

c Resources and support are reviewed in alignment with strategic and programme developments as well as staff and student recruitment plans.

d Resource is allocated to ensure that staff receive ongoing professional development to support and enhance the delivery of a high-quality and innovative student learning experience.

e Processes and activities to support the management of quality enhancement and standards are appropriately resourced to meet strategic, operational and regulatory objectives and requirements.

f The creation of learning environments (physical and virtual) that give all students opportunities to be engaged, so that they all feel like they belong and not isolated or excluded.

Evaluating quality and standards

Sector-Agreed Principle 4: Using data to inform and evaluate quality and support enhancement

Providers collect, analyse and utilise qualitative and quantitative data at provider, departmental, programme and module levels to inform decision-making with the aim of enhancing practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience.

Key Practices

a A consistent, coherent and evidence-informed approach to the collection, storage and management of data is employed across the provider. The approach outlines the types of data utilised and the policies and processes that underpin its use in the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance and enhancement of quality.
b Staff and students are aware of the types of data gathered and how it is stored and used in the management of quality and standards.

c When designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation arrangements, staff and students take account of ethics and data protection requirements when gathering and submitting data for national data sets, regulatory purposes and internal monitoring and evaluation.

d Staff who are required to collect, manipulate and analyse data for reporting and quality enhancement purposes receive training that enables them to undertake these activities effectively.

e Providers in partnership arrangements (including the student representative body, where applicable) ensure data sharing agreements and reporting requirements are clearly stated, understood and reviewed.

f Data is collected and analysed in ways that enable providers to understand and respond to the needs of their student populations, promoting equality, diversity and inclusion.

Sector-Agreed Principle 5: Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision

Providers regularly monitor and review their provision and the policies, processes and practices that underpin it to enhance quality and standards. Deliberate steps are taken to engage and involve students, staff and external expertise in monitoring and evaluation activity. The outcomes and impact of these activities are considered at provider level and conveyed to the governing body to drive reflection and enhancement across the provider.

Key Practices

a Providers agree strategic principles for monitoring and evaluation to ensure processes are applied systematically and operated consistently.

b The scope of any monitoring and evaluation activity clarifies the aims, objectives, activities, appropriate tools and actions, along with highlighting the key indicators of success, issues, targets and relevant evidence (or data).

c Staff and students are engaged in monitoring and evaluation activities and receive appropriate training and support to undertake them.

d The actions and outcomes from monitoring and evaluation activities are communicated to staff, students, the governing body and external stakeholders.

e Improvements and enhancements that have been implemented as a result of monitoring and evaluation are in turn subject to monitoring and evaluation activity to ensure their impact is as intended and remains fit for purpose.

f Monitoring and evaluation activity facilitates providers’ insights and promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion.

g Programmes are monitored and reviewed regularly by internal and external peers, employers and students, in line with the provider’s strategic approach to quality and standards and that of professional bodies where appropriate, regardless of where or how the programme is delivered.
Sector-Agreed Principle 6: Engaging in external quality and standards review

Providers engage with external reviews to enable external evaluation of the effective implementation of their strategic approach to quality, standards and enhancement. Reviews actively include staff, students and peers. They can be undertaken by regulators, agencies or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with recognised sector expertise according to the provision being reviewed.

Key Practices

a. External quality and standards review is built into the provider’s strategic approach and aligns to internal quality and standards review activity.

b. Providers recognise that external reviews are a catalyst for ongoing improvement and strategic enhancement of the student learning experience by promoting reflection, evaluation and implementation of the associated actions.

c. Providers acknowledge and support the expertise and resource required to participate in external quality and standards reviews.

d. Providers who engage in external review understand the UK national regulatory and legislative context in which they operate and the different approaches, forms and focus it may take.

e. Providers understand the requirements and the process for external reviews that may be required by regulators in partner delivery locations.

Implementing the approach to quality enhancement and standards

Sector-Agreed Principle 7: Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes

Providers design, develop, approve and modify programmes of study to ensure the quality enhancement of provision and the academic standards of awards are consistent with the relevant National Qualifications Frameworks, regardless of where or how the programme of study is delivered. Providers ensure their provision and level of qualifications are comparable to those offered across the UK and The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area.

Key Practices

a. All programmes meet standards that are consistent with national frameworks and comparable across the UK and European Higher Education Area.

b. A definitive set of documents are produced from the design, development, approval and modification processes, which are held securely and act as the primary source of information about each programme.

c. The award received, and how outcomes of study are recorded and certificated, is made clear to all stakeholders on the programme.

d. Policies and processes that support the design, development, approval, modification and review of programmes are published on the provider’s website and are easily accessible to key stakeholders.
Sector-Agreed Principle 8: Working in partnership with other organisations

Providers and their partners have proportionate arrangements with effective governance to assure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes that are delivered in partnership with others. Organisations involved in partnership arrangements agree and communicate the mutual and specific responsibilities in relation to delivery, monitoring, evaluation and enhancement of the learning experience.

Key Practices

a Where academic provision is delivered through partnership, all partners agree, understand, communicate and take responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of quality.

b Due diligence processes are completed in accordance with the provider’s approach to maintaining standards and enhancing quality. Written agreements between partners are signed prior to the start of a programme and cover the lifecycle of the partnership including details about closing a partnership early.

c Providers and their partners ensure compliance with the regulatory and legislative requirements of the countries in which they work and maintain an awareness of the cultural context in which they operate.

d Providers maintain accurate, up-to-date records of partnership arrangements that are subject to a formal agreement.

e Partnerships are subject to ongoing scrutiny that includes regular monitoring, evaluation and periodic review to assure quality and facilitate enhancement.

Sector-Agreed Principle 9: Recruiting, selecting and admitting students

Providers operate recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive, enabling students to progress and succeed in their chosen programme of study. Providers maintain and publish accurate, relevant and accessible information about their provision which enables students to make informed choices about their studies and future aspirations.

Key Practices

a Policies and procedures for application, selection and admission to programmes are reliable, fair, transparent and accessible.

b Information provided to prospective students and their advisors for recruitment and widening access purposes supports them in making informed decisions.

c Providers meet their regulatory obligations in relation to the information presented about themselves and their programmes of study.

d Staff, student representatives and external partners engaged in the delivery of recruitment, selection, admissions and widening access processes are appropriately trained and resourced.

e All teams involved in the applications, selection and admissions process ensure information about the applicant journey is consistent and clear. Specific elements of the selection process are clearly defined and any programme changes that can impact decision making are communicated swiftly and consistently to enable informed decision making.
Sector-Agreed Principle 10: Supporting students to achieve their potential

Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to achieve as they progress through their learning journey. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey and enables students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.

Key Practices

a. Accessible, relevant, accurate and timely information is provided to students and other key stakeholders throughout the learning journey about the provider, programme of study and support services available.

b. The specific needs and requirements of all types of students are acknowledged and supported at key transition points throughout their journey.

c. Students, staff and those supporting student progression are aware of the ongoing academic, professional and pastoral services and activities available, and students are encouraged to access them throughout their learning journey.

d. Staff are appropriately qualified, trained and supported to deliver high-quality learning and pastoral support for students.

e. Co-curricular activities are recognised as beneficial for promoting students’ sense of belonging as well as providing opportunities for students to broaden their skills and achievements, complementing the academic curriculum.

Sector-Agreed Principle 11: Teaching, learning and assessing with integrity - enabling students to develop knowledge, skills and competencies

Providers facilitate a collaborative approach to shaping a learning experience that enables students to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies through flexible modes of delivery. Assessment employs a variety of methods that produce outcomes that are recognised and comparable across the UK and globally.

Key Practices

a. Learning and assessment align to ensure students can demonstrate their potential and reflect on and reinforce their prior learning, skills and knowledge.

b. Students are clear about the intended modular and programme learning outcomes and the purpose of assessment, and they are enabled to use feedback to support further learning.

c. Those involved in delivering and supporting learning are appropriately qualified, supported and trained to deliver a high-quality learning experience.

d. Students are enabled and encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to take an active role in shaping and enhancing the learning process.

e. As students transition through their learning journey, they are given the opportunity and support to recognise the progression they have made and direction they need to take to achieve their potential.
### Sector-Agreed Principle 12: Raising concerns, complaints and appeals

Providers clearly articulate processes for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent, accessible and clearly understood by staff and students. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are regularly reviewed and the outcomes are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience.

#### Key Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are accessible, robust and inclusive and enable early resolution wherever possible including concerns, complaints and appeals about the recruitment, selection and admissions process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Information relating to policies and procedures is clear and transparent to students, those advising them and those implementing the processes. Formal and informal stages of the processes are clearly articulated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>Providers meet their national requirements of external bodies with responsibility for hearing or overseeing concerns and complaints.</td>
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<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>Actions resulting from concerns, complaints and appeals are proportionate and enable cases to be resolved as early as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>Processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are monitored and reviewed to ensure they promote enhancement throughout the provider and operate as intended, to the benefit of students and staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>Outcomes from concerns, complaints and appeals are used to develop and enhance the teaching and learning and wider student experience.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of key terms

The terms below are defined in the context of using the UK Quality Code. Further information to support the definitions will be made available in the Advice and Guidance that underpins the Quality Code.

Please note these terms may be defined differently in other contexts (within and beyond higher education) and by different stakeholders (such as regulators, students and individual providers).

**Academic experience** - the students’ experience of studying on their programme, and their experience of any other resources, support, facilities and opportunities that the provider makes available to support their learning.

**High quality** - quality assurance and enhancement practices and processes that are robust and implemented consistently with a view to assuring and enhancing the student experience. It leads to credible and recognised outcomes for students.

**Partnership** - all formal arrangements where a provider works with others to design and/or deliver courses and/or to award qualifications. The processes providers will need to follow to assure high quality will vary considerably depending on the type of partnership and the risks involved. Types of partnerships include:

- validation/approval
- subcontracting/franchising
- work-based learning
- collaboration with employers (including to deliver apprenticeships)
- transnational education (TNE)
- international partnerships and collaborations
- hybrid approaches combining more than one of the above.

**Quality** - Quality in higher education refers to how well providers support students to consistently achieve positive outcomes in learning, personal development, and career advancement, while meeting the reasonable expectations of those students, employers, government and society in general.

**Standards/academic standards** - These are the standards that providers set and maintain for the award of academic credit or qualifications. Individual providers are responsible for defining their own academic standards by setting the pass marks and determining the grading/marking schemes and any criteria for classification of qualifications that differentiate between levels of student achievement above and below the threshold academic standards. These individual provider standards align to national qualifications and credit frameworks and/or The Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA).

**Students** - all learners/students irrespective of background or any protected characteristics, studying at any level and by any mode (for example, undergraduate and postgraduate; full-time and part-time; distance, work-based and on-campus learners; higher education apprentices).

**Students as partners** - working with students as a ‘partner’ or in ‘partnership’ is used to define and indicate joint working between students (or the student representative body, students’ union, association or guild if they have one) and staff at the provider. The level of each partner’s engagement will vary depending on the context and nature of the student
experience. Student partnerships reflect a mature relationship based on mutual respect between students and staff.

**Student voice** - refers to the individual or collective perspective opinion, feedback or contribution of students. It can relate to any aspect of the academic or wider student experience and should be sought across a provider covering the breadth of provision and included in decision-making committees. The use of student voice is integral to the quality enhancement of provision.

**Tertiary education** - refers to all post-secondary education encompassing further and higher education including academic, vocational and professional qualifications.

**Wider student experience/co-curricular experience** - the student experience beyond that of formal academic learning, for example experience gained through representation, participation in sports and societies, careers or volunteering.